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ABSTRACT

In 1985, Nebraska selected Marjorie Brown's philosophical framework as a basis for a curriculum development project. Because inservice efforts to help teachers understand this critical consciousness approach to teaching failed, attention was focused on providing inservice education to help teachers change. The strategy at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln evolved into a three-way approach: professional development for teacher educators, encouragement of the change process in inservice teacher graduate courses and workshops, and revision of undergraduate curriculum. At this time, the learning community (LC) idea was born. For the empirical component, 152 home economics teachers were surveyed using the Curriculum Orientation Profile. The interpretive component included observations of three teachers; indepth interviews with the teachers, their administrators, and students; and writings of the teachers in the LCs. Critical science action research was implemented through LCs. The purpose of the interpretive and critical science components was to understand what it is like to examine one's curriculum orientation and make changes on that orientation and teaching practices. In 1991, 33 participants were selected for 3 LCs. In 1992, 12 teachers were selected for an additional LC; 28 of the original 33 members continued in the LCs for a second year. (Appendixes include transparencies that illustrate LC workshop offerings and the LC process.) (YLB)

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TEACHER EDUCATION REFORM:

Transforming the Practice of Home Economics Teachers Through Learning Communities

Julie M. Johnson

American Vocational Association
December 4, 1992

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TEACHER EDUCATION REFORM

Rationale and Philosophy for Change

To begin with, I'd like to tell you a little bit about our state so you can get a better perspective about the reform in our institution and state. (show Nebraska transparency)

There are five institutions in Nebraska that offer home economics programs.

Chadron State College
Wayne State College
University of Nebraska-Kearney
University of Nebraska-Omaha
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

There is one home economics teacher educator at Chadron, Wayne and Kearney, three in Lincoln and none in Omaha. The Lincoln and Omaha campus offer a joint program. Even though Kearney is now a part of the University of Nebraska system, our programs are still separate.

Much of the impetus for reform was of a statewide nature and I think all of the institutions are working toward reform and using similar strategies, however, I will report primarily on the University of Nebraska-Lincoln activities. Much of what the other institutions are doing are supporting the same type of reforms, however, I cannot speak knowledgeably about their specific activities.

In 1985 Nebraska embarked on a curriculum development project and selected the writings of Marjorie Brown as a basis for the development of curriculum. The decision to use this philosophical framework came from a group called SHEEC (State Home Economics Education Council). This group was made up of six teacher educators from four different institutions, two professionals from the state department, two city supervisors and three teachers.

Collectively, the SHEEC group had relatively little knowledge of this philosophy at the time, however, it was felt that as intelligent and capable people a change in philosophy could be implemented in a relatively short period of time. Even though we were aware of the long periods of time that other states had been working on these concepts, somehow we felt we would be able to do this much more quickly. Carl Perkins funds were used to fund the project and since it was unclear about how long this funding would be available, developing a curriculum document in one year seemed to be important.

Although there were some efforts at inservice education for helping teachers to understand the writings of Marjorie Brown it soon became evident that this was a major undertaking. Even after many efforts were made through a variety of inservice activities, most teachers really seemed no closer to having a good understanding of this orientation. When this was realized, the state director of home economics focused the requests for proposals to use Carl Perkins funds at providing inservice education to teachers which was

directed toward helping teachers change to the critical consciousness approach to teaching.

Reform Approach

Although originally the strategy at UNL was not explicitly stated, it evolved into a three way approach. One of the most important aspects of our change process was to become more knowledgeable ourselves. In this way we could begin to create change in ourselves and our teaching which we hoped would bring about change in our students and the teachers in Nebraska. Our own professional development then became a critical element in our reform approach. We had to transform our own ways of thinking and acting before we could help others. This became the foundation for reform.

We became members of committees where thinking and critical thinking was the focus; we did extensive reading; we interacted with teacher educators from our state and other states working on a similar reform; and we attended classes and conferences on related topics. These classes were both in our state and in other parts of the country. After each activity we worked on making the appropriate changes in our courses. At times I literally felt I was (to quote an infamous phrase) "one day ahead of my students".

At the same time teacher education faculty at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln decided that we would only offer inservice education directed toward helping teachers gain a better understanding of the critical consciousness and cognitive processing orientations of curriculum whether that be related to curriculum philosophy, instruction, or evaluation. Each year we would respond to requests for proposals that we felt would assist the teachers in a movement toward change. Inservice education for teachers, then, became the second part of our reform approach.

This transparency identifies some of the inservice education possibilities offered through UNL since 1986. As you can see they were directed at developing intellectual processes and strengthening the teachers' knowledge of the critical consciousness approach. These included integrating the reading and writing processes, developing listening and other communicative skills, critical thinking, selecting broad concepts, evaluating thinking and transforming one's practice. You can also see that we have worked toward developing a <u>depth</u> of understanding. The pattern of offering is such that a teacher can take a workshop, follow that same idea the next year with more depth, and again more depth in the third year. It would also be possible to take all three workshops in the third year. The requirement is that the teachers must have workshop I before II and II before III. The workshops were timed so in the third year teachers could take all three. This way the teachers could spread their learning out over a period of one, two or three years. Each workshop included theory, guided practice and then practical application to their own setting. In addition to workshops, we revised our graduate courses to better reflect our new learnings and the critical consciousness orientation to curriculum. This was the 2nd part, then, of our reform process.

The third component of our reform approach included revising our undergraduate courses. In addition, we worked with cooperating teachers to assist them in adopting this new approach and to allow our student teachers to try their new ideas at the student

teaching site.

After a few years as we re-evaluated our progress toward helping teachers in the state come to a better understanding and to change their practice, we were disappointed that we saw little progress or movement toward the critical consciousness approach. First of all, we were graduating very few teachers and although some inservice teachers seemed to understand the concepts intellectually, their practice appeared to be very technical and those that were beginning to change seemed to be very few in number.

Research Components

It was at that time that our learning community idea was born. It was fashioned after the Wisconsin project reported by Hittman (1989) in which small groups of teachers were engaged in critical science action research. Critical science assumes people are capable of changing repressive forces that inhibit their development. For example, teachers may be using a particular strategy because of tradition, which in this case would be the repressive force that may inhibit their thinking about choices and in turn inhibit their development. According to Carr & Kemmis, (1986) critique is "aimed at revealing to individuals how their beliefs and attitudes may be ideological illusions that help to preserve a social order which is alien to their collective experiences and needs ... ideological critique aims to reveal their deceptive nature and so strip them of their power" (p. 139). Critical science action research can help teachers understand the various curriculum orientations and make rational curriculum decisions based on a defensible orientation.

It was felt that if we started with small groups of teachers situated in various parts of the state that we could gradually expand the teachers' understandings related to the critical consciousness approach. It was also felt that this process would need to be deliberately slow with time for adequate reflection and critical thinking built into the process.

We decided that critical science would only be one aspect of this total research. In addition we would use components from all research paradigms: empirical, interpretive and critical.

For the empirical component 152 teachers were surveyed using the Curriculum Orientation Profile which was originally designed by Patrick Babin from Canada. The purpose of this study was to identify the curriculum orientation profile of Nebraska home economics teachers.

It was accomplished through these questions:

1. What differences exist in the curriculum orientations held by Nebraska home economics teachers?

2. What differences exist in the curriculum orientations held by teachers
   -who graduated before and after 1985
   -who graduated from different institutions
   -based on the sizes of schools where they teach

-having different number of recent college graduate courses
-with different amounts of recent inservice education?

The data from the empirical study will be reported at another session later in this meeting. The interpretive component included observations of three teachers, indepth interviews of these teachers, their administrators and students and writings of the teachers in the learning communities. Data were also collected from curriculum documents, lesson plans, course descriptions, and teaching materials. Case studies are being completed about the teachers.

Critical science action research was implemented through learning communities and the activities inherent in the learning community, such as writing, critical thinking and dialogue.

The purpose of the interpretive and critical science components of this study was to understand what it like to examine one's curriculum orientation and what it is like to make changes on one's orientation and teaching practices.

This purpose was accomplished through the following objectives:

1. Identify the curriculum orientation and teaching practices of selected Nebraska teachers prior to and following their participation in learning community activities.

2. Understand the processes involved in examining one's orientation.

   a) improve the teacher's understanding of the orientations of curriculum.
   b) improve the rationality of teacher's orientation to curriculum and the resulting teaching practices.

Learning Communities Process

In the first year we publicized the Learning Community idea through a session at our vocational conference and letters inviting teachers to apply were sent to the 523 teachers. More than 80 applications were received and 33 participants were selected for three learning communities, one in each area of the state. During 1991 two all day meetings were held.

Three teachers were selected from this group representing differing school sizes and grade levels taught. Observations were made of three teachers and two indepth interviews were held with the teachers, and one interview with their principals and at least one student.

In 1992 applications were sought for an additional Learning Community. Twelve teachers were selected for this learning community and two all day meetings were held.

Twenty-eight of the original 33 members continued in the learning communities for a second year. Three all day meetings will be held for the second year participants.

If teachers miss the Learning Community meeting, they are sent an independent study packet which they must complete in order to keep them at the same level as the other members of their group. Although this is not the same, it minimizes the impact of their absence. Every effort is made to make them feel part of the group. Pictures of the total group and of the various small groups who worked together in the workshop were taken and given to the teachers. Take home assignments are given that require the teacher to write and reflect about their learning, their teaching, or their beliefs.

A major goal for researchers who embrace a critical perspective is to help practioners develop complex reasoning and social dialogue to foster increased rationality of the educator's everyday practice (Coomer, 1989). According to Coomer (1989).

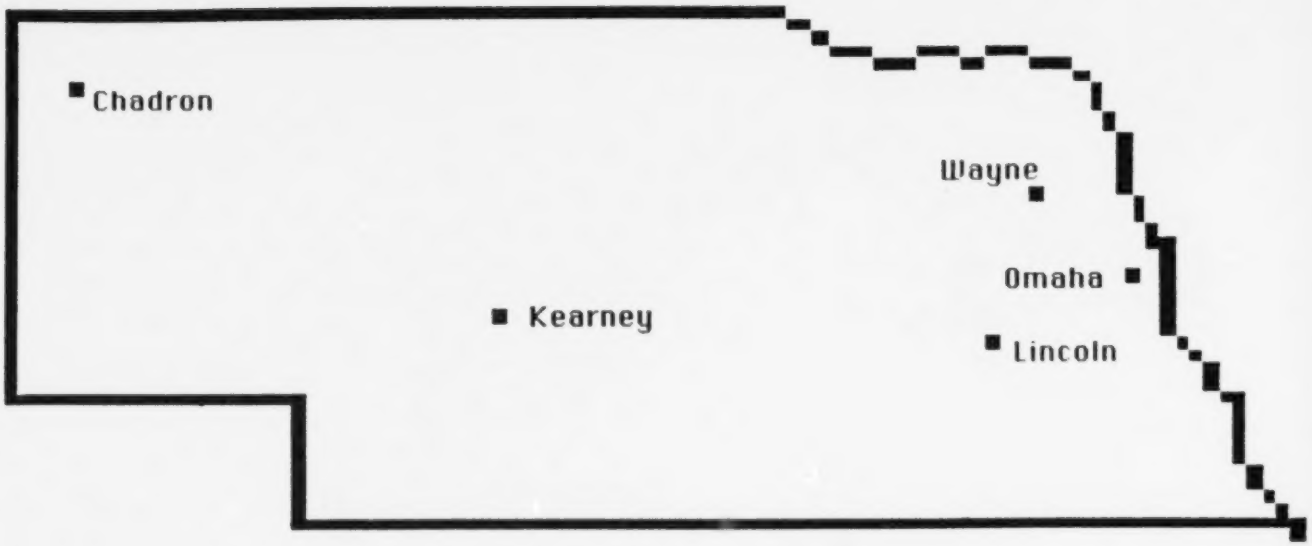
> "Critical research requires that the researcher become an observer and a participant in the educational setting. The research process is a social process involving interchange among the people within a particular education setting. This includes the researcher. The researcher, together with the participants, identifies a practical problem." (Unquote) (p.177)

In this critical science action research process the researcher is a facilitator of communication which raises the taken-for-granted knowledge to the level of conscious examination so that rational decision making can take place. In order to accomplish this objective all 45 teachers participated in the learning community activities. During these activities the researcher acted as a catalyst so that interaction could take place that would lead to individual self reflection and growth (Coomer, 1989).

Preliminary results of the interpretive and critical science portion of this project will be reported at another session during this meeting.

As you can see by my explanation of this research project our focus is currently an inservice education of teachers through the critical science paradigm. Although the strengths of our efforts are focused there, we have not forgotten our own professional development and the continual revamping of our undergraduate courses, the other two components of our reform strategy.

I invite your comments and questions.



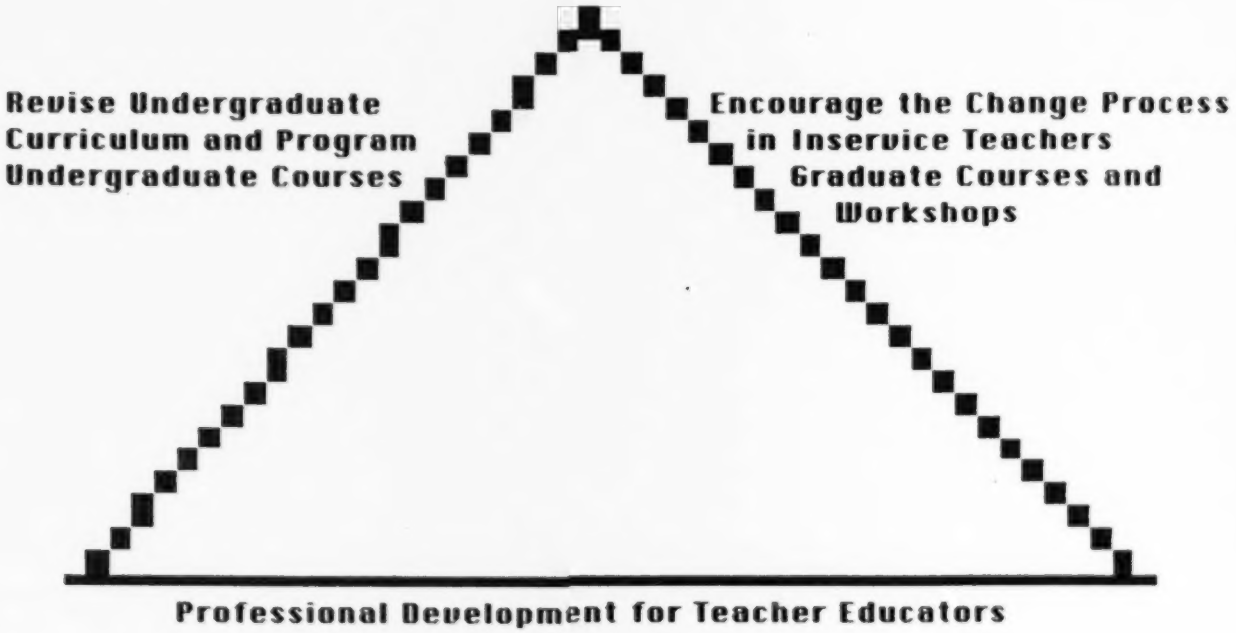
NEBRASKA COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES THAT OFFER HOME ECONOMICS

Chadron State College (1)
Wayne State College (1)
University of Nebraska-Kearney (1)
University of Nebraska-Omaha (0)
University of Nebraska-Lincoln (3)

UNL and UNO are merged and are basically one College within the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

UNK has a separate program which is different from the UNL/UNO program.

Three Way Approach To Nebraska Teacher Change


Revise Undergraduate Curriculum and Program Undergraduate Courses
Encourage the Change Process in Inservice Teachers Graduate Courses and Workshops
Professional Development for Teacher Educators

WORKSHOPS OFFERED TO INSERVICE TEACHERS

Integrating the Reading Process into Home Economics Curriculum
Integrating the Reading Process into Home Economics Curriculum II

Integrating the Writing Process into Home Economics Curriculum
Integrating the Writing Process into Home Economics Curriculum II
Integrating the Writing Process into Home Economics Curriculum III

Developing Listening Skills in Home Economics I
Communication: The Work of the Family II

Critical Thinking I
Critical Thinking II

Selecting Broad Concepts I
Selecting Broad Concepts II
Selecting Broad Concepts III

Issues in Evaluating Thinking Skills in Home Economics

Learning Communities for Transforming Practice I
Learning Communities for Transforming Practice II

Pattern of Workshop Offerings

Year I	Selecting Broad Concepts I
Year II	Selecting Broad Concepts I
	Selecting Broad Concepts II
Year III	Selecting Broad Concepts I
	Selecting Broad Concepts II
	Selecting Broad Concepts III

PURPOSE

TO UNDERSTAND WHAT IT IS LIKE TO EXAMINE ONE'S CURRICULUM ORIENTATION AND WHAT IT IS LIKE TO MAKE CHANGES IN ONE'S ORIENTATION AND TEACHING PRACTICES.

OBJECTIVES

1. Identify the curriculum orientation and teaching practices of selected Nebraska Teachers prior to and following their participation in learning community activities.
2. Understand the processes involved in examining one's orientation.
   A. Improve the teacher's understanding of the orientations of curriculum.
   B. Improve the rationality of teacher's orientation to curriculum and the resulting teaching practices.

LEARNING COMMUNITIES PROCESS

Year I Publicized the Learning Communities and sought applications to participate in the project.

More than 80 applications were received.

Thirty-three participants were selected for three Learning Communities.

Western	Central	Eastern
N=10	N=12	N=11

Two all day meetings were held for each Learning Community.

Observations were made of three teachers. Two interviews were held with the teachers, one with at least one of their students and one with their principal.

LEARNING COMMUNITIES PROCESS (CONTINUED)

Year II Sought applications for a new Learning Community.

East Central
N=12

Two all day meetings will be held for East Central Learning Community.

Western	Central	Eastern
N=9	N=9	N=10

28 of the original 33 members continued a second year.

Three all day meetings will be held for the Western, Central and Eastern Learning Communities.